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ABSTRACT

The Tellin' Stories Project in Washington, DC, was developed to increase the involvement of economically disadvantaged, often limited English-speaking parents in the educational process of their children. The project connected parents, educators, schools, and communities. The third-year evaluation process consisted of these activities: a focus group with parents, staff, and a teacher involved in the project; review of project documents; interviews with parents and teachers; and observation of project activities. The evaluation found that the project has made excellent progress in achieving its goals. It has developed family-oriented activities such as workshops, story-telling training workshops, summer story-telling institute, writing activities, and helping parents teaching children through stories, for 450 parents. The project also has built parental collaboration across linguistic, ethnic, and racial barriers. The project has encouraged respect for children's culture and family traditions, and has increased the input of parents into school policy and practice. Parents have become more comfortable in the school and the classroom. The project also developed a reproducible model that includes these steps: (1) promoting the project, (2) initiation, (3) coordination, (4) invitation, (5) facilitation and training, (6) transferring learning, (7) documenting outcomes, and (8) dissemination. (KC)

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ED 419 967

Tellin' Stories Project

Final Evaluation Report

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Dr. Mary F. Ziegler, Center for Literacy Studies University of Tennessee in a collaborative process with the staff, parents, and teachers involved in the project.

CE 078 688

Final Evaluation Report for the Tellin' Stories Project (Year Three)

"The project turns a light on inside of people that was there all along and then the light spills over into everything."

Tellin' Stories is a project of the District of Columbia Public Schools Center for Systemic Change in collaboration with the Network of Educators on the Americas and the D.C. Area Writing Project. The project is based at Howard University and is funded by a three year grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching. This document is the final evaluation report compiled for the Tellin' Stories Project, formerly called the Family Writing Project.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the Tellin' Stories Project is to increase the involvement of economically disadvantaged parents in the educational process of their children. The project connects parents, educators, schools and communities. A brochure describing the project says, "The Tellin' Stories Project is based on the belief that all parents regardless of their nationality, cultural background, native language, and level of formal education have the knowledge and experience to create their own literature and to serve as sources of literacy at home, in the school, and in the community."

Project Goals

Six major goals have focused the project's activities for the last three years. The goals of the project are to:

- Develop family oriented activities to enable parents with little formal education to involve themselves in literacy activities with their children.
- Build parental collaboration across linguistic, ethnic, and racial barriers.
- Create a school environment which is respectful of the children's culture and family traditions.
- Increase input of low income and immigrant parents in the school policy and practice.
- Increase the comfort level of parents in their child's school and classroom.
- Develop an innovative, affordable, feasible, and easily reproducible model of parental involvement that can be replicated in low-income urban school districts across the country.

The purpose of the evaluation and the methods were defined at the beginning of the project by the Evaluation Team (comprised of project staff, co-coordinators, Barbara D'Emilio and Toni Blackman (and later Imani Tolliver) and parent coordinators, Margarita Chamorro and Lashawn Blango, and the evaluator, Dr. Mary Ziegler) at the beginning of the project evaluation process. Evaluation methods are participatory in that the project staff and parent participants (when possible) are involved in the design and implementation of the evaluation.

The third year evaluation process consisted of three primary data collection methods: (1) a focus group with parents, staff, and a teacher involved in the project, (2) review of project documents, (3) interviews with parents and teachers, and (4) observation of project activities.

Accomplishing the Goals of the Project

The project has made excellent progress in achieving its goals. Goals for the project were established when the project first began more than three years ago. The goals have remained remarkably constant over time and so has the steady progress made in achieving them. Because the project staff is quite small, parents and teachers have taken a leadership role in moving the Tellin' Stories project forward. Project participants report that the project has a different flavor depending on the school or organization that is involved. Following is a description of the way the way parents, staff, teachers and administrators describe how the project has accomplished its goals.

1. **Developing Family Oriented Activities**

   The first goal of the project is to develop family oriented activities to enable parents with little formal education to involve themselves in literacy activities with their children. Project activities have evolved over the life of the project. Activities have been continuously improved as a result of the suggestions made by parents and teachers. Activities for parents fall into three main categories: workshops, storytelling in classrooms, and the summer institute. Project documents show that more than 450 parents have participated in the project activities over the last three years.

   Workshops are conducted weekly over a period of weeks or months depending on the school. In these workshops, parents write stories about their lives and concerns. In some workshops, quilt making is used as a stimulus to begin the writing process. Parents depict their stories graphically on pieces of felt. Squares of felt, each with the story of a parent or a family, are sewn together to make a story quilt. The square also includes a brief statement. The quilt is accompanied by a narrative of the stories that are represented on the quilts. In other writing workshops, parents write their stories and these written stories are printed by the project staff. Selected stories are bound as anthologies and are used as readers in the classroom.

   Story telling training workshops are conducted for those parents that want to become equipped to tell stories in classrooms. Parents help select stories (either stories parents have written or stories selected from children's literature) and they create felt characters to depict the stories to children. Parents learn the art of story telling. Since the beginning of the project, ten parents from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, speaking three different languages, have told stories in more than 30 schools citywide. Parent storytellers have reached over 2,200 students. One school, after a storytelling workshop, developed a school-based team of parent storytellers.

   Summer Story Telling Institute is an annual event for parents, teachers, and other interested community members. This institute brings expert story tellers together with parents and teachers to explore the various ways to tell stories. The institute also focuses on the way story telling can be used to challenge inequities, understand community and look at change. More than 40 people attended the last summer institute.

   When parents describe the project activities, they describe activities that stimulate

writing, storytelling in classrooms, parents teaching children through stories and incentives for parents.

Activities That Stimulate Writing - Project staff selected activities to stimulate ideas that helped make writing interesting for parents who volunteered to attend workshops. Readings were selected and read by project staff and teachers. These included dramatic reading of poetry, stories from literature, oral stories and stories written by other parents. As one parent said, "The poems and stories related to my life. They helped me tell my own story." Themes for stories came from experiences in peoples' lives, like immigration or discrimination. Parents who immigrated to the United States wrote stories about their native lands. These stories were compiled into personal books. These books were used in story telling activities in classrooms and at home. Parents expressed a great deal of pride in showing their books to others and reading their stories. Parents' written stories were collected into anthologies for teachers to use to stimulate writing activities with children.

Making story quilts was an important activity for many parents. In this activity, parents gathered to tell their story by making pieces for a quilt made up of many felt squares. Parents depicted their story through a picture, words, or other symbols. Along with the graphic depiction, they wrote a summary of what the felt square meant. Project staff wove the felt pieces together to make a quilt. The quilt squares told the story of the individual or the family. Parents said that making a quilt was very stimulating and helped them overcome their fear of writing and speaking publically. As one parent explained it, "It helped relieve our anxiety about writing." As a result of this activity, parents from a particular school were able to tell their collective story and receive recognition for their work from administrators, other parents, teachers and children. Some of the quilts are displayed in the schools where the parents' children attend.

Storytelling in Classrooms - Parents teach and entertain children in their classrooms by telling stories and by conducting follow-up writing exercises based on the stories. One parent said, "When we tell stories to the children, the stories come alive in a new way." In order to find interesting stories, parents read a broad range of children's books. Once parents became storytellers, they begin searching for and finding stories to tell to the children. Parents choose different ways to tell stories. Some act out the story. Others make flannel pieces to tell the story with felt characters. One parent commented that she loved the stories that had a "moral" or a teaching point. Parents have developed, documented and stored almost forty stories using felt or other materials. New storytellers have the advantage of a library of stories already prepared for them. In addition to stories from children's literature, parents read from the books they themselves have written in the writing workshops. Parents described how they used their childhood experiences to write stories that were later told to children in classrooms. As one parent said proudly, "Everyone is a story teller."

Parents Teaching Children Through Stories - Through writing and story telling, parents became better teachers. They devised follow-up activities to do with school children that would reinforce both the points of the story and the curriculum focus of the teacher. Words from stories were used to teach vocabulary. Because most of the stories were told by

bilingual storytelling teams, children learned to listen to another language and appreciate life in other cultures. Parents and teachers worked together to identify curriculum topics that could be reinforced by the storytelling teams, for example, number concepts, colors, and seasons. The stories helped to stimulate the children's ideas for other stories. All participants in the project reported that the children responded enthusiastically to the stories and to the parents (especially the bilingual teams) who came to their classrooms to tell stories. Themes about things that are important to parents and children helped build community.

Parents also reported a significant increase in the literacy activities they did with their children in the home. "I told stories to kids to make them understand We drew pictures at home, the same as the story. My kids drew pictures. My kids made felt stories themselves." Several parents reported that they did not know that it was important to read to their children. Some said that they did not know how to select a book or they did not know that their children would like to listen to stories read by their parents. Parents learned how to write and read their own stories and how to value good stories written by others. This formed the foundation of the parents increased ability to use literacy activities to teach their children.

2. **Building Parental Collaboration Across Linguistic, Ethnic, and Racial Barriers**
The second goal of the project is to build parental collaboration across linguistic, ethnic, and racial barriers. Parents reported that the storytelling themes cross all boundaries. Storytelling teams are multilingual. Telling stories to children in another language helps children value differences. People of different races and languages met together to tell their stories. People found that they had a lot in common. "Writing exercises helped us understand one another - a poem about colors helped us understand each other's cultures." One parent who was learning English commented that she learned that words in different languages are often similar. "We are very similar in our heritage and how we have so much in common. "For parents who were English speaking, they commented that they learned how it felt to not speak the dominant language that was used in the school. All parents commented on the value of. . . children and parents learning together and being interested because of the multilingual stories." One person commented that he learned, "Color does not determine a language."

A teacher described the activities of the project that were meaningful to parents. "In the workshops, parents discuss themes for the stories after the discussion they write and read their writings." Multicultural groups of parents, in Tellin' Stories Workshops, practiced writing and reading their stories to one another. Through these stories, they learned a great deal about one another's lives, cultures, traditions, and languages.

In some cases, a teacher reported, "Children and parents write together and then they read the stories." One parent commented that she read her stories to her children and they asked her questions about it. Another person said, "I have been more motivated to learn together with my children." "The community benefits too," said one parent. "When parents work together to learn, all the parents of the community benefit." Parents report that story telling has become a part of their lives. At one school where there is a team of parent story tellers, the administration is considering establishing a position for a parent to be the story telling coordinator. Over the course of three years, four of the parent storytellers obtained paid

positions as educational aides or parent partners even though this was not a planned outcome of the project.

3. **Respect for Children's Culture and Family Traditions**

The third goal of the project has been to create a school environment which is respectful of the children's culture and family traditions. While creating a respectful environment cannot be done by one project alone, the project has made a significant contribution in the schools where it is active. From its inception, the project has had a multicultural, multilingual focus. This focus enabled parents from different ethnicities, speaking different languages, to come together for a common purpose – to enhance their ability to be their children's teacher and to get involved in their children's education.

A major accomplishment at one of the schools was the translation of PTA meetings into Spanish and Vietnamese for the parents who speak those languages. Parents report that in some cases, teachers are not as insistent that parents speak only English at home. The multicultural aspect of the project led to more teachers including multicultural activities in their classrooms, for example, including information about famous Native Americans, famous African Americans, and famous Asian Pacific Islanders.

Parents acknowledged that the children learned to speak English better or learned to respect other languages and traditions through the story telling. One parent story teller commented, "I went to tell a story in the 6th grade. Some of the children did not know how to write in English. I asked the teacher if the children may write in Spanish. She gave permission. The children wrote beautiful stories in Spanish." Multilingual parent teams were able to validate the children's writing ability in their own language.

A parent commented, "We teach our children about the tradition of our people, the musical tradition, the history, the language. One of my children said, 'I don't want to speak Spanish, only English.' I told him, 'No, this way when you go to Guatemala, you will not be able to communicate with your grandmother or other people. And you will not be able to know the country.' I think he understood." The language is one way to keep the traditional cultures alive.

Almost all parents who have been involved in the project report that their involvement in their child's school has increased as a result of participation in the project activities. They report that they feel welcome in the school building and recognized by teachers and administrators. The enthusiasm with which the multilingual parent storytelling teams were received is an additional indicator of the respect for the children's culture and family traditions in those classrooms.

4. **Increasing Input of Parents into School Policy and Practice.**

The fourth goal of the project is to increase input of low income and immigrant parents in the school and classroom. Parents are valuable contributors to the educational process. A noticeable change has occurred in the support that the school administrators are giving to the

project. According to a principal, "The Tellin' Stories Project has provided a positive environment which has encouraged parents to view themselves as writers and partners in the educative process. . . [Our school] strongly supports the efforts of the Tellin' Stories Project which has increased parental involvement 50% over the previous academic year."

Parents explained that the Tellin' Stories Project is like a first step in school involvement. Getting involved in story telling increases a parent's confidence to get involved in other activities. A teacher commented, "Parents start with telling stories and then get involved in other organized projects. It's a motivator, a catalyst, to start other initiatives." The project equips parents for involvement in their child's school.

Telling stories in classrooms has been a very positive experience for the children, the parents, and the school. The teachers hear the parents and it raises their interest in story telling as an activity. It also raises their awareness of and respect for parents. The literacy level of children is also improved through story telling. Parents commented that their roles as storytellers have raised the awareness of the contribution parents can make. This is influencing policy about activities like story telling. "We have parents who have increased their influence in the school," said a teacher. Parents get other roles, even paid positions because of their involvement in the Tellin' Stories project. One parent commented, "The children of politicians hear the stories and ask their parents to tell stories, so this project influences politicians."

5. **Increasing Parents Comfort Level in the School and Classroom**

Most of the comments on the accomplishments of the other goals speak to this goal. It is difficult to be comfortable in a school or classroom without receiving respect. Parents often do not know how to become involved, nor how to have their contribution valued. The Tellin' Stories Project acts as a gateway for parents who otherwise do not see themselves as active in their child's education. Gathering to write and read stories is a first step for many parents believing that they are welcome in their child's school.

Most parents are usually called to the school when the child is experiencing difficulty or when the child has broken the rules. Parents with low literacy skills may see their role and the school's role as adversarial rather than collaborative. Even if parents volunteer in their child's school, the efforts are often relegated to supervising in the cafeteria or on the playground. Telling stories in the classroom gives the parents a different status, one that, according to them, generates respect. The project has documented that parents who hesitated even entering the school building became confident contributors to both the school and their child's educational process.

6. **Develop a Reproducible Model**

The final goal of the project is "to develop an innovative, affordable, feasible, and easily reproducible model of parental involvement that can be replicated in low-income urban school districts across the country. The project "model" has emerged over the three-year life of the project.

Model Developed by the Tellin' Stories Project

The Tellin' Stories project grew from a desire to involve parents of children from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the Washington D. C. Public School System as partners in the educational process. Increased involvement strengthens parents role as their children's first teacher. Immigrant parents and parents with low literacy skills are reluctant to participate in the educational process of their children for a variety of reasons. Immigrant parents report that they are reluctant because they do not speak the dominant language of the school. Other parents report that they do not believe they are competent to be involved. Teachers often misinterpret parents lack of involvement as apathy or lack of concern. The goal of the Tellin' Stories project is to bring together parents, teachers, school administrators, and children to build a community of learners through the art of story telling and story writing. In the three years the project has been underway, a model has emerged that is described by both project staff, parents, and teachers. Following is a description of the model and the way it works in the District of Columbia Public School System.

When the project began, it was called the Family Writing Project. In the first year, two part time co-coordinators and two parent coordinators held writing workshops for parents of children in the public school system. Project staff made flyers or presentations about the project to encourage parents to participate and encourage teachers to be supportive. Workshops were conducted and parents began writing their stories which were turned into personal books and anthologies. At the conclusion of the first year, project staff decided that parents without English language skills and with low literacy skills were more attracted to the idea of writing stories rather than simply writing. Stories became the focal point of the project even though writing remained an important component. The project was renamed Tellin' Stories to indicate this emphasis.

The Tellin' Stories project, as it was called in the second year, took on a more definite shape. Successful activities were identified and tested. These activities meaningfully involved parents in their child's school and educational process. Through contributions of parents, teachers, school administrators, project staff and an outside evaluator, a replicable model of the project emerged. This model was validated by a group of parents, teachers, and staff a the end of the third year of the project. Inherent in the model is the fact that is will continue to evolve as it is carried out in a wide variety of school and organizational settings. Each school or group stamps its imprint on the project activities allowing for a wide range of applications. Following are the steps to carry out the project. These steps have been clarified, tested, and modified over three years.

Promoting the project is the first step. The Tellin' Stories Project can be promoted in a wide variety of ways. In the past, project staff made presentations to principals or they spoke at parent/teacher meetings. Teachers who became familiar with the project promoted it to the principals in their schools. Parents who participated in the project in their school spoke to parents and teachers in other schools. Parent story tellers told of their experiences at meetings with administrators of schools and the school system. Project staff locate teachers who might be interested in the project.

Initiation is the second step. Usually an inquiry is made about the project to someone already involved or to the project staff. For example, an inquiry has been made by a teacher, a school librarian, a school counselor, a principal and a member of a community based organization. The initiator is usually interested in bringing the project to a particular school or organization. This individual generally makes the inquiry because he or she sees the value in parent involvement. Project staff give this individual an informal description of the project and provides names of other schools where the project has been active. The initiator often becomes the project "champion," that is, the person who will find support for the project in their school or organization. These individuals tell their principals about the project and get support. This support is usually in the form of a meeting room for activities. (This is very important as space is at a premium in many schools.)

Coordination is the third step. An event is planned. The event may be a writing workshop, a quilt making workshop or a story telling training workshop. The event is primarily for a particular school and will involve parents in that school. Project staff will prepare flyers for the initiator to give to parents and other teachers. Initiators understand the value of the project for getting parents involved in the school and their child's education and are enthusiastic to begin. If the initiator is a teacher, the teacher will work with the project staff to decide on the event and make plan for it. At this stage, incentives are planned. Parents reported that incentives to participate were important.

Invitation is the fourth step. Parents are invited to attend an event. The invitation is given by the initiator, project staff, or a parent who has participated in the project in the past. The invitation may be personal or it may be in the form of a flyer or other publicity announcement. For example, one teacher recruited parents of children in her grade. In another school, the librarian recruited parents who wanted to be teacher's aides. Parents are recruited by teachers who know them or they are recruited by other parents through word of mouth. A teacher might take an informal poll among parents to find out what day and time would be most convenient. Parents go to teachers they know to find out more about the Tellin' Stories project. One parent said she looked at a flyer and said, "Hmmm, something might be happening here." She spoke to a teacher to get more information. Incentives are planned to encourage people to participate. Incentives used in the project included food and refreshments, books, or stipends.

Facilitation and/or training event is the fifth step. The Story Tellin' Project staff usually facilitate workshops and training events for a period of time. Parents attend the events and begin thinking about what the project can do for them. Parents say things like, "I can pass this on to my children." Or "What I know I can teach." During the event, the project staff encourage parents to express themselves in writing, by making story quilts, and through telling stories. In this process, parents get to know one another better and they get to know teachers in a setting outside their child's classroom. They come to look forward to the event. Project staff prepare an evaluation for the parents to complete. This way the staff can keep in touch with ideas parents have for improving the project. In some cases, the facilitation is taken over by the initiator or another individual on site who is a champion of the project. Storytelling training is provided by the project staff, however, when possible, an on-site coordinator takes over the coordination of the parent story tellers in the classroom. On-site coordinators can be the initiators of the project,

parents who have participated, or other interested teachers. In those schools where the initiator planned a story quilt workshop, principals invited the parents to display their quilts in the school as a tribute to their contribution. The quilt display validated the parents' stories and gives them value. The quilts are a tangible symbol of the contribution that parents make to the school community.

Transferring learning is the sixth step. Once parents have participated in project activities, they begin doing similar activities with their children. Many parents report increased literacy activities in their families. Other parents tell in detail how they have begun to write and read stories with their children at home. Many immigrant parents report that they had not told their children many stories of their homeland and the project gave them an opportunity to do this. For those parents who have taken the storytelling training, they begin to tell stories in classrooms. They also work with the teachers to understand the curriculum topics and the lessons that the teachers would like to have reinforced through the stories. In the process of transferring the learning to their children, parents also learn to navigate their way through the school system. They find their "voice" even if they do not speak English. Several parents report that the outcome of this was their investment in their child's school, a positive relationship with their child's teacher, and for some a commitment to study English or go on to get a GED.

Documenting outcomes is the seventh step. Outcomes of the project are documented through anecdotes by parents to project staff and to school administrators. Outcomes are documented in evaluations and also through presentations to parents who speak about the project to recruit other parents. Because of the small project staff, there is no formal follow-up after a parent has completed the workshop or training event. However, many parents continue to be involved in the project after the particular part they were involved in has finished. When parents were asked about the changes the project has brought about in their lives, they include the following items:

- Parents and children have increased literacy skills and knowledge.
- Parents are better equipped to teach their children.
- Parents write stories and poems and tell these to their children.
- Parents have positive relationships with their child's teacher.
- Parents are trained to assist in classroom activities.
- Parents are trained to tell stories in children's classrooms.
- Parents get to know one another and appreciate their diversity.
- Parent's talents are valued by the school.
- Children have increased literacy activities in the home.
- Children see their parents as their teachers.
- Children are exposed to multicultural teams of parents who enjoy working together.

When teachers and administrators were asked what impact the project has had on their practice or on the school in general, they include the following items:

- Teachers and parents collaborate on a meaningful project.
- Teachers see parents in a supportive teaching role.
- Parents and teachers have respect for people from different cultures.
- Anthologies of parents' stories are published and used in classroom teaching.
- Schools learn a new and valuable way to achieve parent involvement.

- Schools in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have increased parental involvement.
- The broader community is involved in the life of the school.

Dissemination is the final step and is linked to promotion, the first step. Information about the project is available from dissemination activities including publicity materials, presentations at school meetings and conferences, and annual project celebrations. Dissemination activities also include using the project information to build relationships with school administrators, teachers and other community based organizations. A parent who have successfully participated in the project said her job was to bring in other parents, "Once they start, everyone has a story to tell."

Project Staff

Throughout the three years of the project, staff consisted of two part-time co-coordinators and one or two parent co-ordinators. The accomplishments of the project are outstanding when weighed against the small staff and budget.

Project Activities

Storytelling Workshops were conducted in the following schools.

Adams Elementary School
Bancroft Elementary School
Brightwood Elementary School
Bruce Monroe Elementary School
Garrison Elementary School
K. C. Lewis Elementary School
McGogney Elementary School
Meyer Elementary School
Parkview Elementary School
Powell Elementary School
Richardson Elementary School
Shepherd Elementary School

- A school-based storytelling team of fifteen parents worked at McGogney Elementary School and told stories from January to June 1997.
- Over 2,200 students participated in storytelling activities in 30 schools.
- More than 450 parents in DC Public Schools have participated in the project.
- Stories were told in three languages English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.
- Other organizations involved included the Significant Male Taskforce, the Dinner Program for Homeless Women, and the Sarah House, and D.C. LEARN.

In the Tellin' Stories project evaluation process, no individual, either in a focus group, interview, or in the project documents described the project in any way but very positive. It is rare that so broad a group of people, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and project staff react positively to a project. The Tellin' Stories project seems to have filled a niche, a vacuum that encourages community between a diverse group of people who have a stake in the D.C. Public School System.

Summary of the Tellin' Stories Project Model

Promotion	Project staff, parents, or teachers make a presentation to an individual or group about the Tellin' Stories Project. Promotional materials are given to schools for distribution to teachers and parents.
Initiation	An inquiry is made about the Tellin' Stories project. (The project has received inquiries from a teacher, a librarian, a school counselor, a principal or a member of a community based organization.) The initiator is usually interested in bringing the project to a particular school. The initiator starts the ball rolling.
Coordination	An event is planned by the initiator at the school and the project staff. The event may be a writing workshop or a story telling training workshop. The event is primarily for a particular school and will involve parents in that school. (Events have included story telling training, quilt-making workshops, story writing workshops, and story telling institutes.)
Invitation	Parents are invited to attend an event. The invitation is given by the initiator, project staff, or a parent who has participated in the project in the past. The invitation may be personal or it may be in the form of a flyer or other publicity announcement. Incentives are planned to encourage people to participate.
Facilitation/ Training	The Story Tellin' Project staff usually facilitate the events for a period of time. In some cases, the facilitation is taken on by the initiator or another individual on site who is a champion of the project. Story telling training is provided by the project staff, however, an on-site coordinator takes over the coordination of the parent story tellers in the classroom.
Transfer Learning	After parents participate in the project, they begin doing similar activities with their children and they become involved in other activities within the school including participation in an adult education class, a GED class or English for speakers of other languages.
Documenting Outcomes	Outcomes cited by parents include an impact on their literacy, the literacy activities in the home, their involvement in the educational process of their children, and their relationship with teachers and administrators. Teachers report an increase in respect for parents, an appreciation of the parents' contributions to their children and their classrooms, and parent anthologies. Administrators appreciate the increase in parent involvement and in parent contributions to the school.
Dissemination	Information about the project is available from dissemination activities including publicity materials, presentations at school meetings and conferences, annual institutes and project celebrations. Dissemination activities also include using the project information to build relationships with school administrators and teachers.

Importance of the Tellin' Stories Project

The Tellin' Stories Project impacts the achievement of the Family Involvement National Education Goal. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley said, "We believe that strengthening the connection between families and schools is so important that we have made it one of America's National Education Goals. The Goal declares that by the year 2000, 'Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.'"

Many studies clearly indicate that family involvement encourages student achievement or other positive attitudes and behaviors that increase success in school. Families can help their children both at home and at school. When families are involved in their children's education in positive ways, children achieve higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior, graduate at higher rates, and have greater enrollment in higher education.[1] Research shows that children with involved parents do better in school and are more successful in life. In addition to the benefit to children, when parents are involved in their child's education, "... the parents benefit as well. They develop a greater appreciation of their role in their children's education, an improved sense of self worth, stronger social networks, and even the desire to continue their own education. They also come to understand more about their schools and teaching and learning activities in general."[2]

Results from the Tellin' Stories project demonstrate a concrete, tested way to get economically disadvantaged parents involved in the life of the school and in the educational process of their children. Tellin' Stories is a gateway for parents to participate in a non-threatening activity that recognizes their strengths and their potential to be meaningfully involved in the education of their children. According to the co-coordinator of the project, "Tellin' Stories has created an environment of trust in which parents are inspired to write stories and tell stories to their children. This increases literacy skills." The Tellin' Stories Project has made a contribution to D.C. Public Schools, to the parents who have been involved in the project activities, to the children who have listened to parents tell stories in their classrooms, and to the school administrators who have seen an increase in parent involvement that is a direct result of the Tellin' Stories Project.

This evaluation report was a collaborative process among the outside evaluator, project staff, parents and teachers. Many thanks to those who contributed their time to "tell the story of the project."

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[1]Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (Eds.). (1994). A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, Center for Law and Education.

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THE TELLIN' STORIES PROJECT

Connecting Families, Schools & Communities

FACT SHEET

The Tellin' Stories Project is a project of the Network of Educators on the Americas (NECA) which is a nonprofit organization committed to promoting social and economic justice through transformative, quality education for all learners. NECA creates opportunities for the development of equitable relationships among families, students, school staff and community members. We believe that these relationships are essential to transform schools so that they are academically rigorous, culturally affirming, equitable, liberating, connected to the community and respectful of the strengths that people bring.

MISSION: *The Tellin' Stories Project* operates on the belief that all parents, regardless of their nationality, cultural background, native language, and level of formal education have the knowledge and experience to create their own literature and to serve as sources of literacy at home, in the school and in the community. Storytelling and writing are used to involve parents more actively as educators in the school. Stories serve as a bridge which connects families, schools and community.

WORKSHOPS: The following workshops are offered to school and community groups in English and Spanish:

- Parent Books: Parents write personal stories, in prose and poetry, which are illustrated and put into book form. These stories become part of the life of the school as parents not only share their stories with their own children but read them in classrooms. School anthologies may also developed.
  (6-8 ninety minute sessions)

- Storyquilting: Using glue, felt and other materials, participants depict a story from their lives on a felt square which later becomes part of a quilt. As the squares on the quilt are connected, so too are the lives of the participants.
  (5 ninety minute sessions)

- Storytelling Training: Participants learn storytelling techniques with an emphasis on flannel board storytelling. Training includes warm-up and follow-up activities, performing techniques and story selection with an emphasis on multicultural stories.
  (8 ninety minute sessions)

ORGANIZATIONS SERVED: *The Tellin' Stories Project* has offered workshops in 28 public schools in the Washington metropolitan area.

ORIGIN: The project is an offspring of NECA's Books Project and was initiated in 1993. A three year grant for the project, then called The Family Writing Project, was obtained by D.C. Public Schools and NECA from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching. *The Tellin' Stories Project* has worked with over 600 parents in the past five years. The project has a team of parent storytellers which tells stories in Spanish, English and Vietnamese in schools citywide and a school-based team of parents at McGogney School.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: *The Tellin' Stories Project* finances its activities from these and other contributions: D.C. Public Schools Adult Education and Gender Equity Offices, and the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Trish Ahern, Literacy Consultant; Margarita Chamorro, Parent Storyteller; Donald Clausen, Principal; Heleny Cook, High School Teacher; Marcy Fink Campos, Trainer, Neighborhood Reinvestment; Joan Montgomery Halford, Editor, ASCD; Aida Heredia, Spanish Professor, Howard University; Rebecca Shulman Herz, Education Director, DC SCORES; Marlene Hoffman, Retired Teacher; Alicia Horton, Administrator, Center to Prevent Handgun Violence; Dollye Virginia McClain, ESL Teacher; Daryl Jon McDuffie, High School Teacher; E. Ethelbert Miller, Writer, Howard University; Francisco Millet, ESOL Director, Samuel Miranda, English Teacher; Carol Robledo, ESL Teacher; Lynda Tredway, Asst. Professor, GWU; Barbara Wien, Trainer, United States Institute for Peace.

STAFF: Barbara D'Emilio , Coordinator, Margarita Chamorro, Lead Storyteller
Deborah Menkart, Director of NECA.

TO CONTACT US: Please call, write or FAX:

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I have been motivated to learn together with my children. When parents work together to learn, all the parents of the community benefit." **Parent participant**

"Parents start with telling stories and then get involved in other organized projects. It's a motivator, a catalyst, to start other initiatives." **Participating teacher**

"The Tellin' Stories Project has provided a positive environment which has encouraged parents to view themselves as writers and partners in the educative process." **School Principal**

THE TELLIN' STORIES PROJECT

Connecting Families, Schools and Communities

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Tellin' Stories Project uses the power of storytelling, writing and quilting to involve parents as partners in the educational process. With a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education FIRST Program and a small staff we have:

- Offered 26 workshop series in 22 D.C. Public Schools on Storytelling Training, Storyquilting and Storytelling Training.
- Worked with more than 600 immigrant and low-income parents in our workshop series.
- Trained and involved 25 parents in classrooms as storytellers on an ongoing basis. Parents conduct literacy-based follow-up activities and work as collaborators with teachers.
- Made it possible for a team of parent storytellers to visit more than 1,000 classrooms citywide. Stories are told in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.
- Developed a school-based team of 15 storytellers at McGogney Elementary which has been in operation for 2 years.
- Produced 2 school anthologies and assisted more than 50 parents in writing and illustrating books for their children.
- Assisted parents in 11 D.C. Public Schools citywide in creating story quilts for their schools.
- Offered 3 Annual Summer Storytelling Institutes for parents, teachers and community members at which professional storytellers and other educators gave workshops on ways in which storytelling can be used to improve education and strengthen communities.

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THE TELLIN' STORIES PROJECT uses the power of storytelling and writing to honor and involve parents in more meaningful ways in schools. The telling, writing and sharing of personal stories enhances family literacy skills. The connections made by sharing stories strengthens the school community.

The Tellin' Stories Project

Connecting Parents, Schools, and Communities

THE FOLLOWING WORKSHOPS are available in Spanish and English

✧ **PARENT BOOKS** - Parents write about their family histories, their children and the world around them through prose and poetry. These stories become self-published books which are incorporated into the school community. School anthologies may also be developed. (4 - 8 ninety minute sessions)

✧ **QUILT OF STORIES** : Using glue, felt and other materials parents depict a story from their life on a felt square which later becomes part of a quilt. As the squares on the quilt are connected , so too are the lives of the people whose stories are depicted.. (3 - 4 ninety minute sessions)

✧ **STORYTELLING TRAINING** - Participants learn storytelling techniques with an emphasis on flannel board storytelling. Training includes warm-up and follow-up activities, performing techniques and story selection with an emphasis on multicultural stories. This workshop has also been provided for parent partners and educational aides (6 ninety minute sessions)

TO PARTICIPATE - Each school must designate a school-based project liaison (teacher, counselor, administrator, parent) to recruit parents and to secure a meeting space.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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